

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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Minnesotans Encouraged to Apply for Heating Assistance

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule takes effect Saturday, October 15, 2011

ST. PAUL, MN – It was 70 and 80 degrees in many parts of the state last week. Despite the unseasonably warm weather, Minnesotans know all too well that it won't be long before the temperature drops and furnaces all over the state start kicking in.

With winter just around the corner, Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman and PUC Chair Ellen Anderson encourage Minnesota families who may have trouble paying their heating bills to contact their local utility company right away to set up a payment plan.

Cold Weather Rule

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule takes effect this Saturday, October 15. The Cold Weather Rule was established to protect residential utility customers from having their heat shut off through April 15, if they contact their utility to set up a payment plan.

"The Cold Weather Rule is a critical safeguard for the elderly, disabled, and most economically vulnerable people in our state," said Public Utilities Commission (PUC) Chair Ellen Anderson. "Keeping Minnesotans warm, safe, and healthy is essential during our state's bitterly cold winters. Working out payment plans under the Cold Weather Rule will keep the heat on for Minnesota families who are facing real financial challenges during this difficult time."

The Cold Weather Rule is administered by the PUC. Households who need to reconnect their heat for this winter should call their utility company now to take advantage of these payment options. Most utilities offer bill payment options that help financially-stressed household budgets balance out their utility payment amounts over several months.

Minnesota consumers using delivered fuels such as fuel oil, propane or wood to heat their homes are not covered by the Cold Weather Rule.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program & Weatherization Assistance Program

Additional heating assistance programs available to Minnesotans include the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as the Energy Assistance Program (EAP) in Minnesota, and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP).

The Minnesota Department of Commerce administers the LIHEAP program in partnership with 36 local service providers throughout the state. It is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The program helps customers earning less

than 50 percent of the state's median income (\$43,050 for a family of four) obtain grant money to help pay their heating bills.

The average annual EAP grant per household is about \$400. Households with seniors, disabled residents and children are especially encouraged to apply.

"Many Minnesota families struggle financially with heating costs in the winter," said Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman. "EAP provides critical assistance during the winter months to those who need it most, when they need it most."

The Minnesota Department of Commerce also administers the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), which is funded by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). The program provides cost-effective conservation measures to save energy costs for low income households. Customers who meet the income guidelines for EAP may be eligible for Weatherization. Both homeowners and renters may apply for Weatherization.

Other forms of assistance may be available through county social service programs, community based organizations and non-profit agencies such as the Salvation Army's Heat Share.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Information Center provides a wide range of energy saving information that every household can use to help control their heating costs. Energy saving recommendations include:

- **Seal attic bypasses.** The [Attic Bypass Guide](#) from the Energy Information Center will help you locate and fix leaks inside your home that allow heated air to escape into the attic.
- **Turn down your thermostat** to 65° while at home and 55° or 60° when away or asleep.
- **Replace your old furnace** with a new, efficient model. Look for the ENERGY STAR label on all new appliances.
- **Replace or clean furnace filters monthly** during the heating season.
- **Place window film** on the interior of the leakiest windows in your home.
- **Install a carbon monoxide alarm.**
- **Call your utility** about having a home energy audit and ask about a budget plan to spread out your heating costs over several months.
- **Keep radiators and duct registers clean.**
- Call, write or email for our **Low Cost-No Cost Home Energy Guides** that contain many ways to help control energy costs all year long.

For more information on staying warm this winter, visit www.staywarm.mn.gov. This website provides details about heating assistance grants, gas and electric discount programs, weatherization help, and energy efficiency and safety tips. You can also contact Minnesota's Energy Info Center at (651) 296-5175 or toll free in Minnesota at (800) 657-3710.